



# THE FINGER

A COMPREHENSIVE  
GUIDE TO FLIPPING OFF

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STEPHANIE  
PHOTOS BY HERNSTADT



ACID TEST  
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**We are born into this world screaming, bloody, and naked.**



Yanked from a cozy womb, we begin a long and cranky struggle to make sense of hostile, new surroundings. As infants, even before we can speak, we learn to express our feelings by imitating the gestures of others. These might range from a hand in the mouth saying, **"Get those strained peas outta my face!"** to a wild arm-flail meaning, **"Put that thermometer up your own ass, lady."** Either way, we're still communicating with gestures.

The word "gesture" comes from the Latin word *gerere*, which means to comport, or show oneself. Since as far back as the first grade, we've all known that one particular gesture would show anger and frustration better than any other: a raised middle finger. The central digit of either hand, firmly upturned and thrust emphatically, never fails to hit the bull's eye. In the wake of political correctness, when thoughts are considered dangerous and words cause internal bleeding and the heartbreak of psoriasis, the finger stands alone.

**It's an equal-opportunity offender.**



# The Battle of Agincourt

October 24, 1415

According to legend, during the **Battle of Agincourt**, the French taunted English bowmen by threatening to cut off their middle fingers. The hypothesis behind this story is that the English longbow, which was made from the yew tree, would have been impossible to draw without the aid of the strongest finger. When the English won the battle, they allegedly waved their middle fingers at the defeated French, taunting, "We can still pluck yew!" Some even believe that the words **pluck yew** transmogrified through the years into **Fuck you**. Others maintain that the English gesture was actually their backwards "V" sign, since you need both fingers to pull the draw string.

Unfortunately for proponents of this convenient story, the battle of Agincourt is one of the better documented battles in European history. While there was a story circulating among the English ranks that the French had threatened to cut all of their fingers off, there is no account of this being anything more than a rumor. Nor are there any solid accounts that either the middle finger gesture or the British backwards "V" were

## BATTLE OF AGINCOURT



used at the battle, by either side, for any reason. If the gesture was used during the battle, it was probably because soldiers were a surly lot, and it had been around for centuries. It seems the survival of this tale owes its debt to folklore masquerading as fact.

note lack of missing fingers

The finger was an extremely strong insult, and has only become socially tolerable in recent times. As John Bulwer, a physician working with the deaf, noted in his 1644 book *Chirologia: of the Naturall Language of the Hand*, many ancients warned against using it for any reason. They felt the finger was not only deeply



insulting, but lowered the stature of anyone who flashed it. Bulwer concluded that the *conviciū facio* (meaning, *I provoke an argument*), is a "natural expression of scorn and contempt."

Of course, that didn't prevent some ancients from indulging. Roman Emperor Caligula, a **renowned pervert**, frequently employed the power of the finger to embarrass his subjects. He would offer his middle finger to be kissed instead of his hand (as if sleeping with his own mother and horse weren't offensive enough). Caligula particularly enjoyed torturing a palace guard named Cassius with this humiliation, because Caligula thought the guard was too effeminate. But Cassius' sword was the first to strike Caligula down during his assassination. And how feminine is that?

## THE MIDDLE AGES

Soon the barbarians came, Rome fell, and the dark ages settled comfortably over Europe. During this time, the finger seemed to vanish from written records. Other naughty gestures, such as **the fig**, which simulates a penis poking through the labia, took up the slack, and even appeared in the work of William Shakespeare. But the bird seemed to have flown the coop.

19th century anthropologist Carl Sittl attributed the finger's disappearance to the thriving power and prudish attitudes of the Catholic Church. During the Middle Ages, they considered the middle finger symbolic of truth and justice, and did not want it associated with anything *dirty*. Other academics debunk Sittl's theory, since the finger survived the Middle Ages, and is, in fact, alive and well and even practiced by many modern Catholics. Besides, if the church is against phallic symbols, **what's up with the Pope's hat?**

The finger probably didn't come over on the Mayflower, but it was only a matter of time before the bird emigrated to America. What better place to fester than the world's first melting pot where the finger's clarity speaks a Babel of tongues? When exactly it first appeared in the U.S. is uncertain, but the first known flip-off in photographic history happened here.





A GUY NAMED "OLD HOSS" MAKES HISTORY



**APRIL 29, 1886:** It was opening day of the new baseball season, and the **Boston Beaneaters** had gathered for a team picture. If you look carefully in the upper left corner you'll see Hall of Famer **Charles "Old Hoss" Radbourn** resting his *digitus erectus* on the shoulder of the teammate in front of him. This was star pitcher Radbourn's first day with his new team. In addition to being one of the last major leaguers to pitch underhanded, "Old Hoss" is the first professional athlete to make being an asshole part of the game.



# FINGER: ON THE ROAD



The term freeway is a huge misnomer. It's rarely free-flowing and hardly stress-free, and while it may not technically cost any money to drive on one, you pay with your soul. Locked within steel and glass, sweating behind a too-tight seatbelt while staring at someone's "Rush is Right" bumper sticker, it's a vanity-plated invitation to lose your mind.

Experts call this phenomenon ROAD RAGE, and it comes from many sources: construction, grid-lock, and pedestrians moving slower than the sales of the last Spin Doctors album. First and foremost, road rage stems from bad drivers: tailgaters, speed freaks...basically, everyone else on the road but you. The American Automobile Association reports a 51% increase in road rage, or reckless driving, in the first half of the '90s, while a private survey (conducted by EPIC-MA of Michigan) shows that 80% of all drivers are angry most, or all of the time. It's a simple equation:



**FRUSTRATION + BIG MACHINE  
÷ HELPLESSNESS =  
SEVERE ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOR**

If Jack Kerouac were alive today, he'd just stay home.

What would modern commuters do without their car horns? With just a few careful beeps, it's the arbiter of justice; Judge Judy of the intersection. Left hand turn from the right lane? Blasphemy! 35mph on the highway? Drive a friggin' go-cart! Honking a horn is practically colloquial English for "How DARE you SCREW me like that!" But the horn is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to mobile communication.



# IS A CELEBRITY FINGER PHOTO REALLY CONSIDERED TABOO?

For maverick icons, rebellious rock stars and pissed off rappers, it's a good resume-builder. For blow-dried supermodels, it's an easy way to prove they can count. In this pre-packaged age of phony smiles and even phonier teeth, the finger is a victory for honesty and integrity. So why did several famous people decline to be in this book?

Perhaps our current cultural climate won't allow it. We live in a family-safe world, full of rancid Disney musicals, grotesque theme restaurants, and medicine bottles that are really difficult to open. But the finger isn't *dirty*—it's useful, fun, and surprisingly refreshing. So why can't celebrities blow off a little steam? Do we really believe their lives are so sanitized? If we force our favorite stars to deny their base instincts to flip, we may one day have to commit them to a **Betty Ford Center for the Digitally Challenged**. Please, stop the madness.

In reality, celebrities themselves aren't always against flipping the bird. The objectors are often their managers, lawyers, and accountants—people who don't want their clients associated with anything **unpopular**. Now, maybe **belligerent and scary** isn't the best public persona (unless you're a member of the World Wrestling Federation) but do stars really need to lose their Jell-O endorsements over something as silly as the finger? We think not.

Join us in saluting the brave celebrities unwilling to live this lie any longer. They flip the bird day and night and they don't care if you know it; managers, lawyers, and the E! Channel be damned.

# FINGERS



**Rapper ICE CUBE will bust a digit in your ass if you're not nice to him.**





## NOSE JERK

**Gesture:** Palm-inward V sign is brought up under the nose and the fingers are jerked around a few times.

**Location:** Arab countries.

This sign stands for sexual intercourse, or as we say in America, **doin' it**. The woman's upside-down legs are represented by the fingers, and the nose provides a very generous penis. Some think British sailors picked up this gesture in the 19th century and it corrupted into England's Palm-back V. Either way, this gesture is plainly the Arabian way of saying, "large in the nose, large in the hose." Whatever its genesis, this insult looks pretty nasty.



## FIVE-FINGER TAP

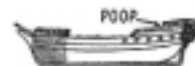
**Gesture:** Touching the forefinger of the right hand to the bunched fingertips and thumb of the other hand.

**Location:** Saudi Arabia.

To Saudis, this says that your mother (the index finger of the first hand) is a whore and you have five fathers—one for each of the fingers on the second hand. While not genetically possible, this is still enough to make Arabian tempers flare.



## MOUTZA "Go to Hell"



**Gesture:** Display of the open palm.

**Location:** Greece (also parts of North Africa).

This open palm refers back to the ancient Byzantine practice where villagers would thrust shit in the faces of chained criminals paraded around town. In modern Greece, any outward hand motion is deemed extremely offensive. People go as far as waving good-bye inwardly toward themselves like a beauty pageant queen. An open palm thrust out in greeting can still cause havoc in small villages along the Aegean countryside, but those small-town folks generally dislike city-slicker poop-tossers, anyway.

# THUMBS UP

**Gesture:** Upthrusted thumb.

**Location:** Iran, Afghanistan, Nigeria and parts of Southern Italy, Israel and Greece.

Contrary to popular belief, the thumbs-up gesture did not spare a gladiator's life in Ancient Rome. A plebian's pointed thumb or *pollice verso* actually meant that the combatant was to be slain. A **HIDDEN** thumb, folded out of sight, or the *pollice compresso* meant he was to be spared. The famous scene in *Spartacus* (or any movie with gladiators), where the Emperor signals that a warrior's life should be spared by the upturned thumb, was flawed by mistranslation through the ages.

In much of the world today, the thumbs up means, "O.K.," "Right On!," or "I like this movie, Gene." But in Iran, Afghanistan, Nigeria, Israel, and parts of Italy and Greece it is an obscene insult, especially when combined with a sweep of the arms. It roughly means, "**Sit on my phallus, asshole,**" and carries the same stigma as the middle finger. In places such as southern Sardinia, where this gesture is noted for being particularly obscene, a hitchhiker would be well advised not to wave his thumb in the

air or he may find himself in a ditch, his face stuffed with uncooked rigatoni.



The Ancient Roman *fonzie verso*

# Test Your

# Trigger Finger

**A**nswer the questions below. When you are done, total the number of A's, B's, C's, and D's and compare them to our handy answer key at the bottom of the next page.

Someone cuts you off in traffic, forcing you to almost hit a schoolbus. You:

- A) Give them a friendly wave.
- B) Honk! That'll show them.
- C) Stick your arm out the window and vigorously wave your middle finger in their direction.
- D) Force them off the road at dangerous speeds, then stop, and laugh.



You're at your 10 year high school reunion. You've had a bit to drink and are finally talking to the cute girl who sat behind you in trigonometry. A balding jock across the gym screams, "I'm talking to you, asswipe!" You:

- A) Move closer so you can hear his commands more easily.
- B) Ignore his rude remarks by turning your back and continuing the conversation.
- C) Telegraph your reply by raising your upturned finger above the crowd.
- D) Hit him over the head with a bottle of champagne and force him to play "bobbing for teeth" in the punch bowl.

Some jerk flips you the bird while you're shopping at the mall with your boyfriend. You:

- A) Cheerily wave hello.
- B) Flip them the bird.
- C) Flip them both birds.
- D) Introduce them to Flip Wilson.



You're pitching a lousy baseball game and the crowd of 24,000 booing fans isn't helping any. You:

- A) Focus on the game, block the rowdy crowd out of your head, and do the best you can.
- B) Signal to the catcher that you will hit the next batter in the nuts.
- C) Create a special kind of **Fan Appreciation Day** with your middle finger as the prize.
- D) Hijack the bullpen's relief pitcher car and drive it through the stands, crushing as many people as you can.



You're running for a political office and your opponent has just raised a dubious claim about your moral character: in particular, your penchant for livestock in lingerie. You:

- A) Plead with your opponent to stick to the issues.
- B) Vigorously deny any accusations and remind your opponent of his frequent cocaine parties for Haitian transsexuals.
- C) Demonstrate that your finger is a mighty orator.
- D) Demonstrate how your opponent takes it orally.

Driving through the desert, you notice a glowing, saucer-like object completely blocking the road. An alien being descends from the spaceship, its arms raised in universal greeting. You:

- A) Drive as fast as you can in the other direction.
- B) Greet these ambassadors from another world with open arms, and an open rectum.
- C) Display your reluctance to join the Galactic Federation with a single-fingered vote.
- D) Rip the alien's arms off and scream, "*Come and get me, E.T!*"

Alright! You're done! Now total the number of A's, B's, C's, and D's you've answered. Find the one with the highest number and consult the answer key below.

**Majority of A's: You are a big pussy.** Other people run your life. You get exactly what you deserve.

**B's:** Some problems require immediate, decisive action. However, your solutions are often complicated and unnecessary. Don't overlook the simplicity of the finger. Practice it at home, or in the office, just to see how it feels. Keep a log of these experiences and share it with a friend.

**C's:** You know that a great gift has been bestowed upon you—your middle finger—and you are not afraid of it. Clearly, this simple and effective tool cuts through any communication barrier. *The finger is your friend.*

**D's: You are insane.** This is not a bad thing, but you are probably better off running around naked, feeding on the raw liver of a gazelle you beat with a rock. Try putting your aggressive energy into community work, like helping disadvantaged children or throwing yourself off a tall building.



# HUBBA HUBBA

Gals Who Want to Do You

MAR  
25¢

# HUBBA HUBBA

What Men Can't Have

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## CLEAN UP YOUR ACT!

Men! Buy our finest beauty soap for that "clean" look women love. Lubricate your life with our stain-resistant formula! Also cures baldness and tooth decay.



ARE YOU A  
SAP WITH  
LADIES?

HOW SHE  
SAYS "NO"

**GIRLS AS HOT  
AS THE  
MYSTERIOUS  
ATOM  
BOMB!**



**TOILET HUMOR**



Dear Hubba-Hubba:  
Back in the war, we used to have a term for the gals you like to picture in this magazine----- French. Personally, I can't stand snails.

-Col. Tom

Dear Sirs:

What is that thing all your models are doing with their hands? It looks like they are trying to put on an odd sort of puppet show, but I never see any children present. What gives?

-Confused



**IF YOU THROW A  
BACHELOR PARTY...  
SOMETIMES YOU  
GET MORE THAN  
YOU ASKED FOR!**

It's your last night of freedom, and the booze flows as freely as your libido. Excitement mounts as your buddies wheel out a special confection with your name all over it. Unfortunately, this sweet-meat has other ideas. Overworked, overheated, and stuffed in a box for a half-hour, she's had it. Despite the cake in your face, you'd better believe she'll still get a big tip.



# FINGER MANIFESTO



**UGLY.** Mean. Base. Vulgar. Obscene. Tasteless. Offensive. Subhuman. Retarded. Dirty. Sleazy. Impolite. Portentous of doom. **UNDOCTIVE.** Malapropious. Vengeful. Scandalous. A glaring example of humanity's shortcomings. **Evil.** Ungrateful. **THREATENING.** Curmudgeonly. Resentful. **Negative.** Inconsiderate. **Controversial.** **Bad.** Naughty. Showing a lack of restraint. A **DETRIMENT TO SOCIETY.** Filled with bad intent. **Malicious.** **Satanic.** **ARCHAIC.** **Anarchic.** Lacking a certain *panache*. **Futile.** Cowardly. **Misanthropic.** **In-your-face.** **Impudent.** **Inappropriate in mixed company.** Only for those who lack the ability to express themselves in a clear verbal manner. **TERRIFYINGLY 3-D.**

## THE FINGER IS ANGRY

White people do it. Black people do it. Asians do it. Italians do it frequently. Senior citizens won't admit they do it, but they do. For over two thousand years the Middle Finger has fought a pitched battle against those who would demand you conform to their five fingered world of polite, open-handed, beauty-queen waves—never expressing any discontent, any anger, or anything you might have to say.

## THE FINGER IS NOT HAPPY WITH YOU

The Middle Finger is the strength of any hand. The true worker of any hand. It is the one which constantly opens and closes for the synchronous benefit of its brother Fingers. The one that curls with optimism and hope around any task which betters life for the entire organism. Do you really think we could get by with just thumbs? Do you actually believe you're above your own Fingers? Clearly the Middle Finger is the superior Finger, because it's longer, it's stronger, and it deserves distinction.



## THE FINGER IS POINTING AT YOU

Want to climb the ladder of corporate America? Let your Finger languish in your palm. Want to climb the ladder of freedom? Let your Finger do the talking.

## THE FINGER DEMANDS YOUR ATTENTION

Want to sublimate the masses? Become a man of letters, politics, and power. Want to incite a riot? Give a crowd the Finger.

## THE FINGER DOES NOT ASK FOR YOUR FORGIVENESS

Want to hide how you feel? Mask yourself in obscure meanings, arcane expressions, and clichés. Want people to know how you feel? Smash their comfortable illusions by unleashing your three-knuckled, flesh and bone, second-Finger-from-the-thumb attack directly upon their unsuspecting eyes.

## THE FINGER IS THE REVOLUTION

The Finger will be televised—but it'll crack the camera lens. Do not imagine for a moment that the Finger will allow itself to be co-opted. It is no mere catch-phrase to be researched, quantified and cataloged for commercial use. It is a threat, a mantra, a way of being that comes from the base of the hypothalamus directly to the last digit of your thrusting destiny.

## THE FINGER WILL NOT TAKE QUESTIONS, NOW OR AT A LATER DATE

Give yourself the Finger. Feel the anger bubbling under the your face? Is it red? Are your eyes bulging out of your head? The Finger is about equality—equal contempt for all who attempt to capture the spirit and freedom of the Finger with their greedy gaze. Now you are ready to perform the Finger's will.

## THE FINGER BELONGS TO EVERYONE

Do not allow yourself to be part of this sanctimony anymore. Raise yourself above prejudice and contempt. Open your mind and unfurl your center digit against adversity, censorship, and ignorance—words which are truly “ugly” and “mean.” The Finger is not the problem—the Finger is the solution.

Salvation is at the tip of your **FINGER!**

